

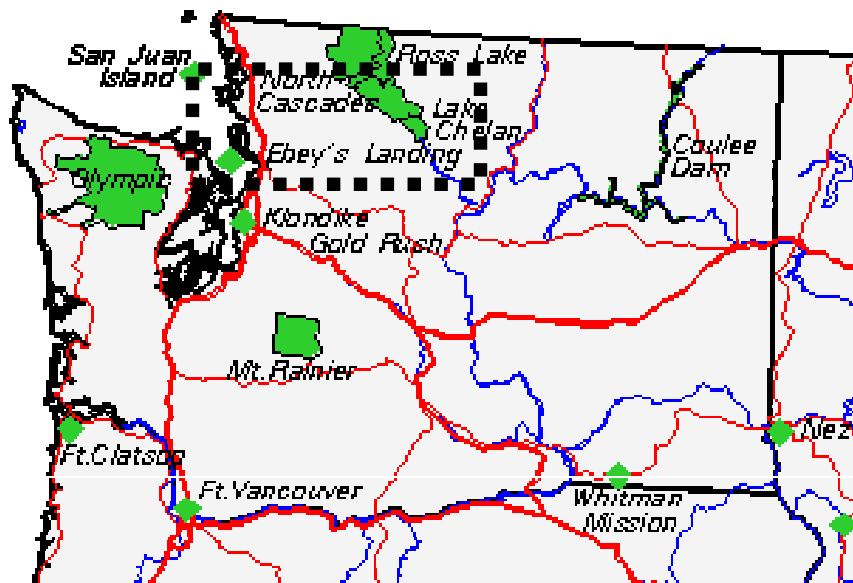
# Report

## Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park – Seattle Unit

### ■ 1.0 Site Description

The Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park (NHP) consists of several units in Alaska, Canada, Dawson City – Yukon Territory, and Washington State. The Washington unit of the NHP is located in the Pioneer Square National Historic District just south of downtown Seattle (see Figure 1), in an area that served as the major embarkation and supply point for prospectors heading to Alaska during the Klondike Gold Rush of the 1890s. The Seattle unit, which was authorized by enabling legislation in 1976, preserves and interprets the role that Seattle served as a primary gateway and source of required supplies for gold seekers on their way to the Klondike gold fields in the Yukon Territory.

Figure 1. Location of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park – Seattle Unit



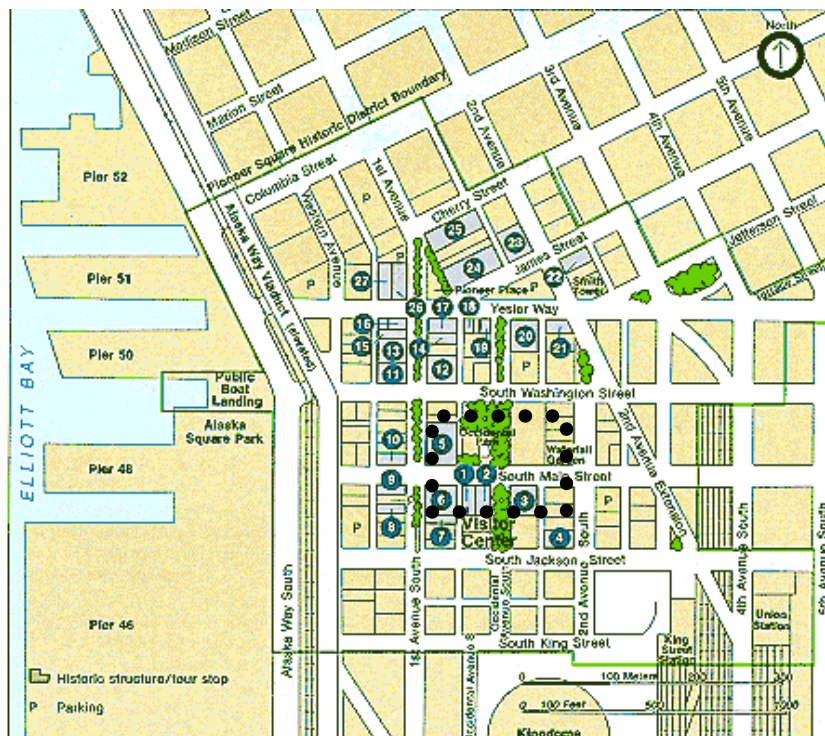
In Seattle, the NHP consists of a Visitor Center in the Pioneer Square Historic District (see Figure 2) immediately south of Downtown Seattle (see Figure 3). The Visitor Center occupies 7,500 square feet of leased space, and provides administrative offices, interpretive programs, educational exhibits, a small classroom, auditorium, and a souvenir/bookstore. There is no federally owned land for the NHP in Seattle. Also, there

are no NHP concessions at this location, although there are numerous hotels, restaurants, and other visitor services throughout the neighboring area.

**Figure 2. Pioneer Square, Seattle, Washington (Circa 1900)**



**Figure 3. Location of Klondike Gold Rush NHP within Pioneer Square**



Activities at the NHP include viewing exhibits, movies and slide shows, attending interpretive education programs, research, a Junior Ranger Program, and gold-panning demonstrations. A summer interpretive program includes ranger-led walking tours of the Pioneer Square area. The interpretive, education, and research programs center on the NHP's gold rush era collection, which contains over 20,050 administrative documents and records, 290 artifacts, a slide file of over 3,000 images, and over 500 historic photos.

The Visitor Center, which is open year-round from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., serves as the informal contact station for many activities in Pioneer Square. The Square, which receives over one million visitors per year, is a mix of housing, offices, art galleries, and retail shops in a 25-square-block area. The Square is adjacent to downtown Seattle, which consists of high-density commercial activities, as well as visitor-oriented hotels, dining, and convention facilities.

A number of other major visitor attractions are near the NHP, and most NHP visitors see these other attractions. The Kingdome, new baseball stadium, coast guard museum, Seattle Aquarium, and IMAX theatre are all within walking distance. A flight museum and science and history museum are also nearby. NHP staff have found that visitation patterns are greatly influenced by activities at these other attractions, particularly large shows and football games at the Kingdome. Also, most school groups that visit the NHP do so as part of a daylong trip that involves other area museums and the aquarium.

The NHP received about 110,000 visitors in 1998, an increase from about 50,000 visitors in 1987. About one-third of the 1998 attendance figure was comprised of students that arrived in formal school groups. The large number of school groups lead NHP staff to believe that their visitors are younger, on average, than at most other NPS facilities in the northwest. The visitation patterns started to flatten out in the mid-1990s; today, the top six visitation months (May through October) account for only two-thirds of annual visitation.

There are no fees at the Visitor Centers, but groups are required to make advance reservations. Due to the tourist nature of Pioneer Square, there is no predominant pattern for group size of the remaining visitors. About 60 percent of visitors are first time; repeat visitors tend to be residents of the Seattle area. About one-half of NHP visitors are from the Seattle area, although many out-of-town visitors are accompanied by a Seattle resident. Most out-of-town visitors tend to be from the Pacific Northwest, although there is a fair amount of geographic diversity due to the tourist and convention activity in downtown Seattle. Most visitors spend about 45 minutes, on average, at the NHP. School groups tend to spend about 60 to 70 minutes at the NHP.

The NHP expects visitation to continue growing by up to five percent annually for the next several years. At this point, the physical capacity of the auditorium and exhibit space, as well as the quality of experience on ranger-led tours are the major limitations on visitation growth. NHP staff project that they can only accommodate about 130,000 annual visits with current facilities and staff levels. Due to these constraints, the NHP does not advertise its presence with travel and tourism conferences since they cannot accommodate additional large tour groups.

A new General Management Plan (GMP) was prepared in 1996 to help the NHP address visitation growth and facility needs. The major component of the GMP includes leasing of additional space for near-term expansion, and longer-term purchase of a permanent facility for the Visitor Center. The GMP also calls for increases in interpretive exhibits, guided walks through Pioneer Square, off-site education with local schools, and interpretive displays throughout Pioneer Square and at Washington Landing.

## ■ 2.0 Existing Transportation Services

The NHP's location near downtown Seattle greatly facilitates the use of Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) services for park visitors. Five regular local bus routes stop in front of the Visitor Center, and an additional six routes stop within 150 feet. Overall, more than 60 different bus routes have a stop within four blocks of the Visitor Center. An historic trolley, which runs along the Seattle waterfront, stops in front of the Visitor Center. The Visitor Center is within Seattle's "downtown free-ride zone," which allows bus riders to use the buses at no cost during the daytime.

Seattle is currently constructing a light rail system that will have a stop within four blocks of the NHP. An Amtrak station is also four blocks away. The Washington State Ferry Terminal and cruise ship terminal are within three blocks of the NHP. Since 1989, a private tour operator has offered a "downtown trolley service" that provides stops at hotels, the waterfront, and the NHP Visitor Center.

Visitors that use these current ATS services have excellent access to the Visitor Center via an integrated network of sidewalks, including walkways through several parks in the area. NHP staff indicated that there is a problem with petty crimes and vagrancy in the Pioneer Square area, and some visitors have expressed concern about safety and protection, particularly after dark. These safety concerns were identified as another factor prompting the NHP to carefully manage visitation levels.

The NHP is within four blocks of freeway off-ramps. While there is no on-site parking at the Visitor Center, over 13,000 private and city-owned parking spaces are within walking distance. The Pioneer Square and adjacent downtown areas experience roadway congestion that is typical of major metropolitan areas. The Pioneer Square area also experiences major problems with parking congestion, particularly for on-street spaces. Near the Visitor Center, the NHP tries to give on-street preference to tour and school buses.

## ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Overall, the NHP characterized current transportation access and circulation as "excellent," particularly for modes other than private vehicles. The one area of ATS services that the NHP would like to see addressed is the addition of a dedicated shuttle system between major tourist attractions and transit terminals in the downtown area. This shuttle

would be oriented at serving attractions that are beyond walking distance from each other. For example, it could link the NHP Visitor Center, waterfront, aquarium, science museum, and flight museum, and serve major transit hubs such as Amtrak, the ferry terminal, cruise ship terminal, and the King Street station (bus tunnel).

Only informal discussions have been held regarding such a shuttle, so no operating details are available. However, given the high level of tourism throughout Pioneer Square and local expectation for well-run transit services, this shuttle may need to have service frequencies of 15 minutes or less during peak times. An operating plan would need to consider frequent roadway congestion in the area.

## ■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

NHP management holds periodic meetings with management at other museums and tourist attractions in the area to coordinate tourism services and share information and ideas. Management has also worked with local tourism and hotel officials to discuss major events in Seattle, as well as to encourage hotel shuttles to provide access to the NHP Visitor Center. These communication channels have been the primary means of discussing transportation access and circulation, and provided the impetus for the shuttle suggestion.

Current transportation services and programmed improvements, such as the LRT system, will continue to provide outstanding access to the NHP via ATS modes. While access to the downtown and Pioneer Square areas is well-served by ATS services, local circulation, particularly to other attractions that are beyond walking distance, could benefit from a dedicated shuttle system.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

*Official Map and Guide*; Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, Alaska/Washington; National Park Service.

*General Management Plan – Development Concept Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*; Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park; September 1996.

*Klondike Gold Rush NHP Home Page*; National Park Service; <http://www.nps.gov/klgo/>.

## ■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Willie Russell; Superintendent; Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park – Seattle Unit